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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA/RR GM 65-2
March 1965

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES OF INDOCHINA



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES OF INDOCHINA

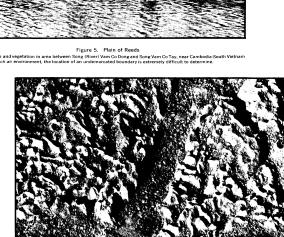
Background Indochina has eight international boundaries (counting the federal boundary with North Vietnam) and one internal boundary (the provincial administrative line between North Vietnam and South Vietnam). No active dispute exists over the boundaries between Laos and Thailand or between Laos and Cambodia, which for most of their extent are demarcated.* Thailand accepts its boundary with Cambodia, however, only on a de facto basis and maintains a rather vague and noncommittal administrative line. The provinces of Cambodia sovereignty overlap the Preah Vihear Temple site on the borders. The interior boundaries of the three states are demarcated, but they have not been officially established and consequently susceptible to dispute. The potential for trouble is illustrated by numerous incidents involving the Chinese, French, British, and American air and naval Vietnamese armed forces. Another source of trouble between Cambodia and South Vietnam is the question of the status of Cambodian territory which was lost to the Khmer Communists in the Gulf of Siam. Most recently, North Vietnam's cartographic claims to the Lantan area of Laos and the disputed areas of the Mekong River have caused concern, as do its assertions that Laotian aircraft are bombing "North Vietnamese" towns in that area.

All of the boundaries and the conflicting national attitudes toward them have important roots in Indochina's colonial history. As shown on Figure 1, Indochina in the late 17th century included the Kingdom of Siam, the Kingdom of Annam, the remains of the Kingdom of Champa, and the separate Kingdoms of Tonkin and Cochin China ("the Red River Delta"). During the 17th century, huge walls that had been built during the reign of King Le Thanh Tong were breached, allowing the Siamese to capture Hanoi in 1680. By 1700, the Siamese had captured the entire Red River Delta, and by 1724 had taken the city of Hue. In 1738, the Siamese captured the city of Quang Tri, a few miles north of the present Demarcation Line. At that time Cochin China extended across the entire course of the Mekong River, as well as the northern portion of present-day Laos that lies west of the Mekong River, as well as the present-day provinces of Rôlôm and Attapeu, which are east of the Mekong. Cambodia's current territorial claims against South Vietnam are based on this historical fact. The Siamese also captured the city of Phnom Penh in 1780, and the city of Saigon (then known as Cochinchina) in 1795. The Siamese also captured the city of Chau Doc in South Vietnam, a factor that still complicates the Cambodian-Vietnamese relationship, often from this era.

* A demarcated boundary is one that has been marked physically on the ground with either a surveyor's chain or a wire fence. A delineated boundary is one that has been marked on the ground with a surveyor's chain or wire fence, or by a line on the map (line of the deepest navigable channel), or along a water body also may be regarded as demarcated.

Figure 1.
Indochina in the late 17th century.Figure 2.
Indochina about 1860 showing areas of Cambodia and Laos after French annexation.Figure 3.
Indochina, 1900.Figure 4.
Indochina, 1945.

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Figure 5. Photo of Roads
View of roads and population in area between Lang Son-Chau and Lang Van Ong To, near Cambodge (South Vietnam). It is at an elevation of 1000 feet above sea level. (unpublished boundary/territorial dispute)Figure 6. Aerial View of Livestock Area
A series of photographs showing the great importance of animals in Laos and Vietnam. This photograph shows a large herd of cattle in a valley. The caption indicates that the animals are used for plowing, for transport, and for food.

In the beginning of the 19th century the Annamite emperor had recruited Tonkin and South China into a single country that extended into the Mekong Delta, with the Cambodians as vassals. This was the Annamite Empire. France, whose interest in Indochina dated from the arrival of French missionaries in the early 17th century, demanded a shift to the possession of territories converted by the Annamite government into personal property of the French. The French, however, had military forces. Siam, taking advantage of the Annamite defeat, then consolidated its control (1813) over the provinces of Laos and the Mekong River basin, and extended its influence over Cambodia (see Figure 3). In 1859, all territory on the left bank of the Mekong River and islands in the river were annexed by France. In 1863, all territory on the right bank of the Mekong River and islands in the river were annexed by France. The provinces of Laos, Savannakhet, Sekong, Champasak, and Siethone - all on the right bank of the Mekong River and its tributaries - became the new provinces of Angkor and Battambang, which France had rechristened to Siam in 1867.

The other exterior boundaries of Indochina were settled during the period 1859-66, 1867-1873 and 1893. Siam agreed to the delineation* and demarcation of what are now the boundaries between Siam and Laos, and between Siam and Thailand. France and Britain agreed to use the Mekong River as the border between Laos and Burma.

By the start of the 19th century, France had thus created a colonial entity consisting of the three provinces of Laos, the two provinces of Cambodia, and the two provinces of Vietnam. The boundaries of Laos and Cambodia were established by the 1863 and 1867 agreements. For other boundary changes between these components that were largely the result of royal administrative actions, this was the Indochina that was conquered by Japan in 1940.

The Japanese Government, in late 1940, encouraged Thailand to attack Indochina and then, in March 1941, acted as arbiter to a dispute that resulted in Thailand temporarily occupying Laos. After the Japanese conquest, the territories were returned to Laos and Cambodia by the Washington Accords between France and the United States. The Japanese, however, retained Laos and Cambodia. In addition, other than the 1962 IDJ decision on the site of the Preah Vihear Temple, no other major boundary changes have occurred.

Survey analyses of both the interior and exterior boundaries of Indochina are given on the reverse side of this memorandum.***

* The banks of a river are designated as right or left as one faces downstream. ** A delineated boundary is one whose alignment has been agreed upon and described in writing or otherwise. The fact that a boundary is delineated does not mean that it is demarcated or that it may not be located on the ground precisely.

*** See the detailed discussion of the boundaries of the individual countries treated here may be found in the International Boundary Study series prepared by the Office of the Geographer, Department of State.

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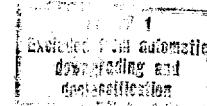
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